

December 21, 2021

Shannon Brault
Pioneer Press
10 River Park Plaza #700
St. Paul, MN 55107



Dear Ms. Brault,

Based on your passion and history for writing stories about high-profile events, I believe I have a story that would interest you and your readers. I invite you to write about an animal rights rally hosted by my organization, CLAW.

CLAW, the Community for the Longevity of Animal Welfare, is dedicated to fighting for the health and safety of all animals, and we advocate for banning ownership of exotic animals as pets. We are hosting a rally on the steps of the Minnesota State Capitol at 10am on January 8th, 2022.

Your readers will be interested in learning more about CLAW, our mission, and the rally. The rally is the first of a series we have planned, so we hope to spread the word and encourage people to attend. Clearly, your readers are invested in high-profile events in the Twin Cities area, and this is an event that they would benefit from knowing and learning about.

Please see the attached press release for more information regarding the upcoming rally and the reasons CLAW fights for animal rights.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 507-440-1109, or grace.chalmers@claw.org. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

I will reach out to you within three days to make sure you have all of the information you need and to set up a meeting with Abigail Hofferson, the president of CLAW.

Sincerely,

Grace Chalmers

NEWS from the Community for the Longevity of Animal Welfare

December 21, 2021

Grace Chalmers

Phone: 507-440-1109

Email: grace.chalmers@claw.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CLAW To Host Rally for Exotic Animal Rights

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Community for the Longevity of Animal Welfare is holding a rally against owning exotic pets on the steps of the Minnesota State Capitol at 10 a.m. on Jan. 8, 2022.

The organization, also known as CLAW, is a non-profit organization that aims to protect the health and welfare of all animals around the world by raising awareness and educating others. This rally is the first in a series that CLAW has planned to educate the public about exotic animals.

CLAW fights against the adoption and ownership of exotic animals. They believe that exotic animals have the right to remain in their homes in the wild, and that if people would like to adopt a pet, they should look to domesticated animals like cats and dogs.

“The ownership of exotic animals as pets is a cruel and evil practice. Non-domestic animals have a right to remain in their homes with other animals of their kind,” said Abigail Hofferson, the president of CLAW. “It is our duty to help wild animals stay wild.”

Hofferson and her team have been fighting for years for more legal action against people owning exotic animals, but never saw the results they were after. Esther Jorgenson, Community Relations Manager, realized that educating more people would help further their cause.

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“We can’t fight this battle alone,” said Jorgenson. “We hope these rallies will expand this conversation and encourage more people to fight against owning exotic animals. We need more people to take action.”

The first rally will feature an introduction speech by Hofferson, as well as an educational speech by Lucy Thorston, the Director of Communications. Thorston plans to lay out steps for people to take to fight for more protection of exotic animals. The rally will conclude with an announcement and overview of the next rally.

CLAW hopes to see large numbers at their rally, and to inspire others to take a stand with them. More information about the rally can be found on CLAW’s website, www.yourCLAW.org.

Contact Abigail Hofferson at abigail.hofferson@claw.org with any questions or to get involved.

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Grace Chalmers

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Professor Dean Beckman

Owning an exotic pet is a controversial topic. While some perceive this to be a sign of wealth or privilege, others see it as cruel and selfish. My organization, the Community for the Longevity of Animal Welfare (CLAW), believes the latter. Removing an exotic animal from the wild is dangerous and evil. We advocate for the health and welfare of all animals by raising awareness and educating others.

Ownership of an Exotic Pet

Do you own a pet? If you do, you're a part of the over 70% of Americans who own pets, about 231 million people (Bedford). Clearly, many people enjoy owning pets. Animal-lovers see the idea of owning pets, whether they be domesticated or wild, as enjoyable, happy, and fun. Pets are companions, and many owners view their pet as an extension of their family or consider their pet a member of the family. A majority of those pets are domesticated animals like cats and dogs. However, a 2016 study found that over 13% of U.S. households owned a pet classified as an "exotic" animal. The ownership of exotic animals has increased by over 25% since 2011 ("AVMA Releases Latest Stats on Pet Ownership and Veterinary Care").

What determines an "exotic" pet? Traditionally, the term "exotic" is used to describe animals that have been taken from the wild (Flowers). This includes reptiles like snakes and turtles, amphibians like salamanders and frogs, and birds like cockatoos and African grey parrots. Rarer types of exotic pets include tigers and primates. Raising an exotic animal in a human household does not "domesticate" the animal, it may only appear to be tamer than its wild counterparts. Domestication happens over the course of many, many years, through selective breeding of desirable traits. Cats and dogs are considered domesticated because they were selectively bred to live amongst humans, and humans can provide for their basic needs (Daly).

A debate involving the ownership of exotic pets has been ongoing for decades, but with a rapidly increasing rate of possession of these animals, the discussion has become a hot topic in recent years. Some encourage owning an exotic pet, citing reasons like allergies to domestic animals, longer life spans, and a general learning experience. Others argue against owning wild animals, claiming they deserve to live with their own kind and that it is a cruel practice, among other concerns.

CLAW believes that owning an exotic animal is an evil practice that should be illegal on all accounts. Nobody should be allowed to own exotic pets. We advocate for the safety, health, and wellbeing of all animals worldwide, and as non-domesticated animals, we believe remaining in the wild is best for the welfare of exotic animals.

First and foremost, owning an exotic animal as a pet can be incredibly dangerous concerning physical health. Wild animals have a high risk of carrying zoonotic diseases, which are diseases that are transmissible between animals and humans and vice versa. Herpes B, monkeypox, and Salmonella are all types of zoonotic diseases. Herpes B is very common among macaque monkeys but is often deadly in humans. Monkeys are also able to transmit Ebola and monkeypox. Salmonella is commonly transferred by reptiles, with over 90% carrying the infection and shedding it in their feces. Humans tend to contract salmonella after the improper handling of a reptile. Like monkeys, reptiles tend to carry a disease that has no effect on them but can be incredibly harmful to humans. Salmonella can cause death in severe cases. Handling exotic animals can be extremely dangerous to the physical health of humans (“The Dangers of Keeping Exotic Pets”).

Exotic animals also pose a danger to public safety. Tiger cubs are commonly bought because they are cute when they are young. However, as they grow, many owners release them because they don't have the resources or capabilities to care for a fully grown tiger. However, the “wild” the tigers are released into are simply rural areas in the U.S. where they are not equipped to survive, and there have been recorded cases of tigers mauling children and adults after being “set free” by their owners. As recent as May 2021, a tiger was seen wandering the streets of Houston, Texas, wearing a collar. While the owner attempted to bring his tiger back into his house, a neighbor pulled a gun and threatened to shoot if the tiger wasn't quickly restrained.

Thankfully, no one was injured. However, it is evident that many people could have been hurt, by both the tiger or the man with the gun (Spencer). Tigers are not the only dangerous exotic pets. Alligators have been released in environments where they are uncommon and have posed dangerous threats to the surrounding inhabitants. Monkeys have bitten humans. Snakes have attacked and strangled others. Many people are at risk when one “adopts” an exotic animal. Clearly, it is far too risky and dangerous for one to even consider owning a wild animal as a pet. (“The Dangers of Keeping Exotic Pets”).

Another drawback of “freeing” an exotic pet by releasing it into the wild is the threat of creating an invasive species. When an animal is released into an unfamiliar environment, the most common outcome is that it does not have the resources to survive and dies quickly. However, some animals are able to survive and actually alter the environment. In Florida in the 1980s, Burmese pythons were a popular pet. However, too many owners released the snakes when they were too big to take care of. Instead of dying, these snakes were able to adapt and live in their new environment. This posed a serious threat, not only to the people living in Florida but also to native species and the environment. Altering an environment, especially at this level, can have dangerous repercussions for thousands of people and animals. Animals that are not meant to live in a specific environment should not be living there. They belong in their native habitats or ones that can suit their needs (Henn).

One thing that many owners of exotic pets don’t seem to realize is how big of a challenge it can be to raise a wild animal. Many are not prepared to provide for their pet or meet all of their needs. Animals need to be with their own kind. Wild animals need to remain wild.

Those in favor of owning exotic animals point to the benefits for the owners. For people that are allergic to cats and dogs, owning a reptile like a tortoise or python can help them enjoy

the benefits of owning a pet. However, this completely ignores the difficulty of raising an exotic animal. Swapping a cat for a snake is not a simple task. Snakes are not domesticated, and although it may seem like a better choice for those with allergies, snakes are still wild animals and will behave as such. This is also incredibly selfish on the part of the owner. Even if they were very prepared to own a wild animal and feel ready to take care of it, an animal will almost always live its best life in the wild with other members of the same species.

Others will say they appreciate the long lifespans of exotic animals. While indoor cats tend to live for an average of 15 years, and dogs for an average of 12 years, many wild animals have longer lifespans (“Feature: A Dog That Lives 300 Years?”). Some reptiles and birds have lifespans ranging from 20-40 years, depending on the species (“Why Choose an Exotic Pet, Anyway?”). It is understandable that people would prefer a pet with a longer lifespan, so they can have more time with their animal and postpone the pain of losing a pet. However, this is a selfish outlook. Firstly, exotic animals can only survive as a pet as long as they are taken care of. Rarely do people commit to caring for one for 40 years. Secondly, this is a very selfish act. Neglecting domesticated animals in favor of exotic animals based on lifespan is a common act to avoid the pain of losing a pet within a few years. This position only respects the feelings of the humans, not the animal’s right to life or its welfare.

Although owning an exotic pet is morally wrong, without strict laws, people continue to obtain and own all types of wild animals as pets. We must stand together and fight this heinous crime. Although the topic of owning an exotic animal has grown into a larger debate in recent years, many people and potential owners are still disastrously uneducated. To combat this, CLAW encourages people not only to do their own research, but attend learning seminars and rallies to learn from others as well. We also promote contacting your elected government

representatives. Ask them to look into ways of addressing the complex issues of the exotic animal trade and to create more strict laws to protect all animals (“How to Help Exotic Animals”).

The most important step to take is to continue to make noise and speak up for the protection and wellbeing of all exotic animals. No wild animal deserves to be removed from its native habitat for the purpose of a human’s enjoyment. It is selfish and cruel to submit exotic animals to this way of life. CLAW promotes the health and safety of all exotic animals, and encourages others to join the fight for the protection of animal welfare.

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